

A silhouette illustration of a child being bullied. One child is standing and being pushed or pulled by another child who is leaning over them. A third child is crouching in the background, possibly watching or participating. The scene is set against a dark grey background within a light grey speech bubble shape.

HOW DO I FIND OUT IF MY CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?

FIRST:

You need to have frequent conversations with your child or adolescent to ask about what happens at school. Establishing a relationship helps you keep the lines of communication open and gives you a sense of context for what your child or adolescent experiences day-to-day.

SECOND:

If you get a note from your child's school saying that he or she is being bullied by the other students, take it seriously. The problem is, however, that you cannot always be sure that the school/teachers will discover that your child is having this sort of problem or that they realize how serious a situation is. Neither can you expect that your child will necessarily talk about problems of this nature to you. There can be various reasons

for this. Your child may feel that being bullied is a personal defeat, or he or she may have received threats from the bullies. The child may have tried before to tell an adult about the bullying and may not have been given any real help. He or she may be afraid that involving adults will make the bullying even worse. Therefore, you must be particularly sensitive to signs and changes in your child.

It is important that you do not try to explain away your child's problems and hope that they will go away by themselves. It has been clearly documented that bullying can negatively impact a child's formative years as well as later adult life. Research suggests that systematic bullying can leave deep psychological scars which can lead to depressive attitudes and a tendency toward negative self-image, even years after the bullying has ended.

Q&A: What are the Warning Signs?

YOUR CHILD—

Comes home with torn, dirty, or wet clothes or damaged books, or “loses” things without being able to give a proper explanation of what has happened.

Has bruises, injuries, cuts, and scratches and cannot give a credible explanation for what caused them.

Loses interest in school and gets poorer grades.

Does not bring classmates home and rarely spends time with classmates after school.

Seems afraid or unwilling to go to school in the morning.

Chooses an “illogical” route to and from school.

Seems unhappy, downhearted, depressed, or has mood swings with sudden outbursts of irritation or anger.

WARNING SIGNS

Often has little appetite, headaches, or stomach aches.

Sleeps restlessly with nightmares and possibly cries in his/her sleep.

Steals or asks for extra money from members of the family (to soften up the bullies).